

5. Acts

A. Authorship of Acts

The universal testimony of the early church says Acts was written by Luke (see Authorship under Gospel of Luke for more information).

The title, “Acts,” points to **the movement of the gospel**. “Of the Apostles” is a little misleading (remember, these titles weren’t inspired!) as the work deals almost entirely with Peter and Paul and the persons and events associated with their ministries.

B. Purpose of Acts

- 1) Luke states the main reason he wrote (Luke 1:4; Acts 1:1-2)—to write an **accurate** history of Christian beginnings so Theophilus and other Christians would have **certainty** about what they had been taught.
- 2) In carrying out this purpose, Luke doesn’t tell *everything* that happened in history of the church—he is **selective**, showing how Christianity, which began as a small Jewish sect, moved from Jerusalem to Rome where it became a worldwide religion.

C. Characteristics of Acts

- 1) This book bridges the **gap** between the Gospels and the epistles (**letters**). It gives the **background** needed for understanding the epistles. It answers questions such as:
 - a. How did the Gentiles receive the gospel?
 - b. How did Christianity move from a small sect in Palestine to a worldwide religion?

Though Acts was written **after** Luke and most of Paul’s letters (62-64 A.D.), because it fills the gap between the two and gives necessary background to the epistles it was later put between the Gospels and the epistles.

2) The Holy Spirit

- a. Spirit Baptism and Filling

Spirit Baptism	Spirit Filling
Refers to one’s position in Christ—it places all true believers into the church which is the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13)	Refers to one’s experience in Christ—being controlled by the Spirit
Occurs once in believer’s life, at regeneration (except 2:1; 8:14-17)	Occurs throughout believers’ lives (Acts 2:4; 6:3; 9:17; 11:24; 13:52)
Results in membership in the body of Christ, union with Christ, and union with other Christians	Results in strength in temptation, boldness in testimony, equipping for service, courage, thanksgiving, Spirit’s fruit

Acts 8:14-17 – These were genuinely saved individuals who had the Spirit (no one at any time in history can be saved apart from the Spirit, John 3:5; Rom 8:9), but the external manifestations of the Spirit had not been manifested, v. 18. The reason this didn't happen at the moment of salvation was to tie the two groups (the believers/churches of Jerusalem and Samaria) together—they had the same Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon them in the same way as on the Jews at Pentecost.

Acts 10:44-48 – These Gentiles experienced the same effects of having received the Holy Spirit as the Jews (2:2-4; cf. 11:15) and the Samaritan believers (8:14-17) did.

b. Miracles and Tongues—See Appendix B, “Spiritual Gifts Today”

3) Fulfilling the Great Commission

a. How the Great Commission was fulfilled—

- **Preach** the gospel (testify, witness, speak, the Word of God spread, proclaim, preach, prove, teach)
 - (1) When the gospel was proclaimed to Jews Christians showed that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah and all must believe in Him for salvation (see 13:14-41 as an example)
 - (2) When the gospel was proclaimed to Gentiles, in addition to proclaiming Jesus as the promised Messiah, Christians confronted idolatry by pointing them to the true God as their Creator and requiring repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (see 17:22-31 as an example)
- **Baptize** believers
- **Establish** them in the faith
- **Formation of a church** (including elders/overseers and deacons; cf. Acts 16:11-40—we read of conversions and baptisms [16:14-15], but no mention of a “church” and “officers”—yet note Phil 1:1; 4:15!)

b. Results – indigenous local churches

- *Indigenous* means local or native
- Indigenous *church* means that a church is composed of baptized believers from that populace, they do the work of the Lord, and they are self-governing and self-sustaining
- Note Acts 14:21-23; 20:32
- This does not mean local churches have no connection with other local churches, see Acts 11:29-30

4) Local Churches

- a. Indigenous (see previous point)
- b. Composition
 - Baptized believers (Acts 2:41)
 - Jew or Gentile (Acts 15:11)
 - Shared beliefs and moral lives (Acts 15:29)
 - Officers—elders and deacons (Acts 6:1-6; 14:23; see also Phil 1:1)
- c. Characteristics
 - Apostolic doctrine, 2:42
 - Fellowship, 2:42
 - Worship (including the Lord's table), 2:42
 - Ministry to each other, 2:44-45; 6:1; 9:36
 - Personal holiness, 5:1-11; 15:28-29
 - Congregational government, 6:2-6

5) Connection with Israel and the kingdom of God—Jesus Christ

- a. At first there was a close connection between the church and Israel, mainly in their attendance at the temple (for example, 3:1).
- b. Later—especially as the gospel was spread throughout the world—the church became clearly distinct from Israel (the gospel would first be given in synagogues, but later believers would leave). It took some time (in Jerusalem, at least) for this transition to be completed.
- c. The kingdom of God is seen as something future and anticipated (1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31)

6) Two responses to preaching of the gospel, 13:44-52

- a. Belief
- b. Rejection

7) Results of Witnessing for Christ

- a. Belief, baptism, church formed, established in the faith
- b. Rejection by Jews and Gentiles

8) Conversion and Ministry of Paul

- a. Paul was a Pharisee violently opposed to Christianity, 9:1-2
- b. Saved by Jesus Christ on the way to Damascus, 9:3-19

- c. Immediately in Damascus began preaching Jesus to be Christ and God, 9:20-22
- d. After this initial ministry in Damascus—
 - Spent three years in Arabia, see Gal 1:17-18; 2 Cor 11:32-33
 - Returned to Jerusalem for 15 days, Acts 9:23-29; Gal 1:18
 - Then to Tarsus for several years, Acts 9:30
 - Barnabas found Paul and brought him to Antioch to minister for a year to the new church there, Acts 11:25-26
 - Paul and Barnabas brought a financial gift to Jerusalem church from Antioch (11:30) and then returned to Antioch (12:25)
- e. Paul's Missionary Journeys
 - The Holy Spirit and the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas out to spread the gospel, 13:1-3
 - We call these "Paul's missionary journeys," though the word *missionary* is never used (first used in 1625 of those involved in a *mission*, especially a religious one).
 - Each journey involved preaching the gospel and establishing new believers as local churches (see above), and then returning to Antioch to report their ministry (this forms the basis for our "missionary" practices). Acts records three of these journeys:
 - (1) Acts 13-14 (see map on p. 41)
 - (2) Acts 15:36-18:22 (see map on p. 42)
 - (3) Acts 18:23-21:16 (see map on p. 43)
 - After these journeys Paul went to Jerusalem, was seized in the temple, and then taken into custody by Roman soldiers (21:17-36). The rest of Acts details his trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea, culminating in his voyage to Rome, where Luke's account ends, with Paul under house arrest but preaching the gospel! (28:30-31)

9) The Jerusalem Council, Acts 15

- a. Occurring in between Paul's first and second missionary journeys
- b. Issue: Jews from Jerusalem came to the church at Antioch maintaining that Gentile Christians had to observe the Mosaic Law, 15:1-2a
- c. The church sent Paul and Barnabas to the Jerusalem church to inform them of and deal with the situation, 15:2b-5
- d. The Jerusalem church recognized that in light of the gospel—
 - All "are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (15:11)
 - Christians should abstain from idolatry and live morally pure lives (15:28-29)

Paul's First Missionary Journey



Paul's Second Missionary Journey





D. Keys

- 1) Theme: *The **Church Witnessing** for Christ*
- 2) Verse: **1:8**

E. Outline

Here's a basic outline of the Acts—

The Church witnessing for Christ in:

- 1) Jerusalem, 1-7
- 2) Judea and Samaria, 8-12
- 3) The Ends of the Earth, 13-28

Here's a more detailed outline of Acts—

- 1) Introduction, 1:1-8
- 2) **The Witness to Jerusalem, 1:9-8:3**
 - a. Anticipation of the church, 1:9-26
 - b. Founding of the church, 2:1-47
 - c. Growth of the church, 3:1-8:3
 - Apostles: Preaching, healing, and enduring persecution, 3:1-5:42
 - Deacons: Praying, teaching, and enduring persecution, 6:1-8:3
- 3) **The Witness to Judea, Samaria, and Syria, 8:4-12:25**
 - a. The gospel to the Samaritans, 8:4-25
 - b. Conversion of a Gentile, 8:26-40
 - c. Conversion of Saul, 9:1-31
 - d. The gospel to Judea, 9:32-43
 - e. The gospel to the Gentiles, 10:1-11:30
 - f. Persecution by Herod, 12:1-25
- 4) **The Witness to the Ends of the Earth, 13:1-28:31**
 - a. Paul's first missionary journey, 13:1-14:28
 - b. The Jerusalem council, 15:1-35
 - c. Paul's second missionary journey, 15:36-18:22
 - d. Paul's third missionary journey, 18:23-21:16
 - e. Paul's trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea, 21:17-26:32
 - f. Paul's journey to Rome, 27:1-28:31